
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 February 2020

by S A Schinaia MSc EngD FGS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 May 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/L2630/W/19/3240958

Land Adj. to Meadow Cottage, High Road, Wortwell IP20 0EN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr A Ruler against the decision of South Norfolk District Council.
 - The application Ref 2019/0911, dated 9 April 2019, was refused by notice dated 11 October 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as 'erection of 4no. dwellings (including 1no. self-build plot) with parking, turning and construction of new highways access'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The application was made in outline with all matters reserved apart from access. I have had regard to the site location plan Dwg WHR/01 and proposed site plan Dwg WHR/03A, but only in respect of details relating to access. I have considered layout details shown on the submitted plans on a purely illustrative basis.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are (i) whether the site would be a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to the development strategy for the area, and (ii) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having regard to the rural character of the landscape.

Reasons

Development Strategy

4. The appeal site is a large plot of land situated between the A143 and High Road, sloping towards the floodplain of the River Waveney to the south and west of the property. The site is outside of the Wortwell development boundary. Paragraph 1.19 of the supporting text to Policy DM 1.3 of the South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies (2015) (SNLP) explains that the development strategy was introduced to take account of different local areas, promote the vitality of urban areas and recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, while supporting rural communities in agreement with the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

5. Any area outside of the defined settlement boundaries is referred to as countryside, in which paragraph 1.23 and Policy DM 1.3 of the SNLP states that the Council will support development proposals only in exceptional cases, consistent with specific development management policies or site allocation, or where there are demonstrated overriding benefits in terms of economic, social and environmental dimensions. The policy is consistent with paragraph 8 of the Framework which requires planning systems to play an active role in guiding development to sustainable solutions, also in terms of appropriate locations. The appeal site is not allocated and there is no development plan policy which promotes development on it.
6. The appeal site is within walking distance from the village of Wortwell, although walking would be limited to daylight hours due to the presence of unlit paths. The village offers very limited services and facilities, including a pub, a farm shop, vehicle repair shops, a car dealer and a community centre. The site is close to bus stops, but bus services to reach villages with more services are infrequent and stop about 17.00 hrs. Cycling may be possible in the summer months when the days are long, but I am not persuaded that this would be a regular mode of transport in the winter when it is dark and there is inclement weather.
7. For the above reasons, future residents would very likely be heavily reliant on unsustainable transport modes, such as private motor vehicles, to reach services and facilities in the village and in larger settlements further afield for daily needs. In reaching this view, I have considered paragraph 103 of the Framework, which indicates that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. However, in this case, this is not sufficient reason to justify the development, which has poor access to essential services.
8. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal site does not represent a suitable location for housing, having regard to the development strategy for the area and accessibility to services and facilities. The proposal would therefore be contrary to Policy DM 1.3 of the SNLP and Policy 1 of the Joint Core Strategy for Norfolk, Broadland and South Norfolk (2011) (JCS), which addresses the sustainability requirements of development.

Character and appearance

9. The appeal site is in an area characterised by sporadic dwellings with strong rural character along the western side of High Road, including the cottages north and south of the property. The rest of the land beyond the A143 and High Road is open countryside. The appellant has maintained that the character of the appeal site does not have any specific merit in comparison with the surrounding countryside and landscape views, such as the opposite floodplain, and that its development would not affect the appreciation of the countryside nearby from the High Road.
10. However, it appeared evident during the site visit that the appeal site with its natural vegetation and hedgerows and trees around its perimeter represents an undeveloped gap which makes a positive contribution to the rural character of the area and landscape views. Furthermore, due to its sloping topography, views of the appeal site are possible not only from High Road but also from areas across the floodplain of the River Waveney.

11. The proposed development would increase and consolidate the built environment around the area and erode the open character of the rural scene. Therefore, I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the countryside and the rural landscape of the surrounding area. The proposed development would be contrary to Policy 2 of the JCS, and Policies DM 1.4 (d, i), DM 3.8 (4) and DM 4.5 of the SNLP, all seeking to respect the character of areas, including countryside and landscape.

Other Matters

12. I have considered the concerns of neighbours regarding the impact of the proposed development on ecology. There is no detailed evidence to indicate that the mitigation measures in the submitted ecological surveys would not be successful. In terms of the effect on the living conditions of neighbours relating to outlook, the indicative layout indicates that the site could potentially accommodate the four dwellings without resulting in unacceptable living conditions for future or existing residents owing to available space within the site, in addition design and layout are matters reserved for future consideration.
13. My attention has been drawn to several examples of other planning permissions within the area and an appeal. However, based on the limited information I have been provided I cannot be certain that the circumstances of each case are similar to those before me. For example, the appeal site in Tharston is close to Long Stratton, a much larger settlement than Wortwell. Therefore, I have considered the appeal on its own merits.

Conclusion

14. The appellant indicates that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land. The Council have maintained that they are able to demonstrate a supply of more than 6 years. The proposal would provide additional market housing and some economic benefits particularly during the construction period. In terms of social and economic benefits, residents would make use of the few services that are present in the village albeit this contribution would be small. I also note that the scheme would include one self-build plot. However, even if I were to conclude that there is a shortfall of housing land supply of the scale suggested by the appellant, the adverse impacts of the scheme would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.
15. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

S A Schinaia

INSPECTOR